

Public education in Greece

Aspects and Trends of Emerging Privatization



ΟΜΟΣΠΟΝΔΙΑ
ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΩΝ
ΜΕΣΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

Greek Federation of
Secondary Education
State School Teachers



**Διδασκαλική
Ομοσπονδία Ελλάδας**
**Greek Primary Teachers'
Federation**



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Introduction

Education as a social institution, a social organisational scheme, a framework for the development and reproduction of a social formation, but also as a fundamental humanitarian value, has always been an arena of ideological, political, social and economic conflicts. Indeed, the education systems around the world and the historical paths they have taken reflect the ideological, social, economic and political developments that have taken place in every corner of the planet over time. Education systems are in essence symbolic representations of the economic and political organisation of the societies they serve. In education, one can see the mirror image of society. From this vantage point, in managing educational institutions, the political system essentially does nothing more than organise and shape the functions of education according to its own ideological and economic agenda. Often, the details characterizing educational structures and functions ultimately show the ideological context of both education and society as a whole.

Any attempt to privatise education will surely generate strong reactions from society, but in particular from those that fought for the establishment of free, public education, and that are fighting today for its protection. However, for some years now, this social group has begun to realise that **social, political and economic conditions have already created a battering ram that is trying to pave the way for the privatisation of all levels of the country's education system**. Teachers of all levels, their trade unions, families and students themselves are confronted daily with privatisation trends throughout the education system. Teachers, as scientists, professionals and public officials, but also as family members, are experiencing many manifestations of these trends. In the same context, families, see large portions of their income being

spent on education services provided by private entities.

One may reasonably wonder about the limit of privatisation of education. Does it lie with principles of privatisation or with the everyday educational and social practices of society?

The teachers' trade unions - which cover the entire school system of the country through the Greek Primary Teachers' Federation (DOE) and the Greek Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers (OLME) - mindful of current, as well as socio-historical and political contexts, believe that the Greek education system is facing a point where a more organised and perhaps a more 'aggressive' privatisation seems to be on the doorstep.

This intervention, in addition to highlighting theory through research and an analysis aimed at a wider context, is a call to stakeholders to pursue the need to **safeguard and further upgrade the public and social character of our education system and to promote public education as the most appropriate strategy for effective growth, prosperity, social justice and cohesion**.

This study seeks to analyse the multi-faceted phenomenon of emerging privatisation of primary and secondary education in Greece. In particular, it investigates issues such as:

- Theoretical approaches to the privatisation of education
- The economic aspects of private and shadow education
- The laws and institutional frameworks that allow for 'irregular' privatisation
- The resolutions and policies of the Greek Primary Teachers' Federation (DOE) and the Greek Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers (OLME) concerning the privatisation of Greek public education
- Teachers' attitudes towards the privatisation process in Greek primary and secondary education.

Important findings

Education spending is one of the most fundamental categories of public expenditure. However, compared to other EU member states, in Greece, public spending on education has declined considerably in recent years. Whilst there was an increase in spending on education from 2000 to 2010, due to the financial crisis, public funding for education substantially decreased from 2012 to 2016. It is also worth noting that within the same period there was a 'shift' in public spending from secondary to primary education.

Studying State budget expenditure for education, it appears that the proportion corresponding to salaries and remunerations has increased compared to the proportion of expenditure for infrastructure and equipment. Private education spending has decreased substantially, from 3.3 billion Euros in 2009 to 2.1 billion Euros in 2016 (a decrease of over 33.3%). Spending on shadow education (tutoring services, private lessons, foreign languages learning outside school, as well as services provided by educators, child minders and babysitters) as a percentage of public education spending is now around 34.7%. Spending on shadow education as a percentage of total private education spending is 40.1%.

The results of the study show **that household spending on education is relatively high, as the financial crisis continues to exert pressure on parents**. The above figures illustrate that the cost of education is a significant burden for Greek families.

The findings of the study show that teachers are concerned about the "colonisation" of public education by privatisation processes and the inability of the State to safeguard the role and mission of public education. Almost 50% of teachers surveyed agree that **shadow education undermines the fundamental characteristics of public education**. The findings further show that there is a **clear preference for public ed-**

ucation among future teachers for economic and/or ideological reasons.

Through the analysis of the resolutions and policies of the Greek Primary Teachers' Federation (DOE) and the Greek Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers (OLME) concerning privatisation of the Greek public education, it becomes evident that the two leading trade unions in the field of public education have, over time, pointed out the significant weakening of the welfare state. They have frequently highlighted the risks associated with undermining the essence of public education and have systematically denounced the efforts to privatise public education.

There is no doubt that the political arguments of both the Greek Primary Teachers' Federation (DOE) and the Greek Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers (OLME), as recorded in their public texts and statements against the commercialisation and privatisation of education, **aim at safeguarding human and civil rights and, subsequently, at protecting social cohesion, considering the educational process as an fundamental human right and public good**.

The study captures teachers' views regarding the factors behind the rise of privatisation in public education. Teachers agree that one of the factors responsible for the privatisation of education is the lack of staff in public education. According to their views, other important factors are the lack of infrastructure, the distrust of parents towards public education and the underfunding of public education.

Moreover, an equally important factor in the rise of privatisation is the 'privileged' framework under which shadow education is allowed to operate in Greece. Under pressure of private interests, many governments appear to be tolerant or passive towards the creation of an environment which favours the invasion of the market in public education.



▶ Recommendations

The conclusions of this study highlight, in Greece, public spending on education has been decreasing over time compared to EU member states. On the contrary, spending on shadow education has increased (spending on shadow education as a percentage of spending on public education is around 34.7%). Important factors behind the privatisation of education are the lack of staff in public education, the lack of basic infrastructure, and the general targeting of public education officials by systemic and non-systemic entities and media.

Based on the findings of the study, the following measures and initiatives are proposed to support public education:

1. **Increase funding** for public education
2. Target the geographical areas that have been affected the most by the financial crisis
3. **Increase teachers' salaries**
4. **Provide scientific and pedagogical support** for teachers
5. **Counter any attempt to target and discredit public education** from media, governments, private bodies and organisations seeking to increase distrust of parents and the Greek society as a whole towards public education

6. **Provide targeted support to socially vulnerable groups** throughout our educational system

7. Take political and institutional **measures to address educational and social inequalities**

8. Take political, economic and institutional measures to **strengthen all public educational structures and programs** (e.g. two-year pre-school education, all-day primary school and nursery school, additional teaching support, remedial tuition, 'second chance' schools, etc)

In conclusion, this approach offers a new interpretative framework for the causes, concepts, perceptions and practices within and beyond contemporary Greek reality.

Finally, it is clear that we need more research on the operation of school education and the link between educational research and the decisions taken in the field of education policy.



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